

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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COMMENT PERIOD REOPENED, PUBLIC HEARINGS SCHEDULED ON RECLASSIFICATION OF ALLIGATORS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will hold two public hearings late in May on its proposal to reclassify some American alligators in Louisiana. The proposal also included changes in the special rules to simplify license requirements and allow the sale of alligator meat.

In reopening the public comment period, the Interior agency also announced it would propose new rules in 30 days, spelling out procedures for exporting and reimporting alligator hides.

Public hearings will be held on May 25 at the Civic Center, Morgan City, Louisiana, and May 29 at the Hayden Burnes Building, Florida Department of Transportation Auditorium, Tallahassee, Florida. Both hearings will begin at 1 p.m. All comments received between May 10 and June 5, 1978, will be considered.

Once in danger of extinction throughout most of its range, the American alligator has made a remarkable comeback in recent years under strict Federal and State protection. The U.S. alligator population is now estimated to total about 800,000. In 1977, about 75 percent of U.S. alligators were reclassified from endangered to threatened status. The species remains listed as endangered in Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and inland areas of South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, and as threatened in Florida and coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia,

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Texas, and Louisiana. ("Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened," a less dire status, means that a species may become endangered within the foreseeable future.)

Under the October 1978 proposal, alligators in nine Louisiana parishes would be reclassified as "threatened, similarity of appearance." Alligators in this category are not considered to be biologically threatened, but some restrictions on commercial activities involving them must still be imposed to aid law enforcement because they are indistinguishable from alligators that are endangered.

This status has been proposed for alligators in Iberia, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Charles, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany Parishes. Alligators in three other Louisiana parishes--Cameron, Vermilion, and Calcasieu--have been classified as "threatened, similarity of appearance" since 1975.

The alligator also is protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora under which it was recently reclassified to the less restrictive category of Appendix II because of the species' improved biological status. Commercial trade is allowed in Appendix II species under conditions established by the Convention.

Notice of the hearings and reopening of the comment period was published in the May 9, 1978, Federal Register. Comments and requests for additional information should be sent to the Director (LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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